

## Suggestions for an Endless Landscape

Chukwudubem Ukaigwe responds to Carnation Zine's most recent issue – *Vol. 2: Pleasure* – filled with artworks and writing by BIPOC creators centred around joy, desire, and intimacy.

By Chukwudubem Ukaigwe - November 17, 2022



I'd like to think of pleasure through the multiple offerings of an upright bass. Its form vibrates as its four strings are tickled by calloused hands; it ecstatically dances. This embraced apparatus releases harmonious waves that meet alcohol in the middle, exciting Friday listeners into tapping feet, or perhaps escalating their juices into reckless dance. In the sweat of the moment, both dancers and by-

standing voyeurs are consumed by thoughts of erotic pleasure. The upright bassist is intoxicated with grandeur—the sublime feeling of mastery and control. To the trumpeter, the bass is fallow ground to be cut through, a tactical formation for song-singing. She threads through her improvised solo, enjoying the company of the walking bass—perpetually present—as it brings her back to her elemental core. She zooms through octaves and stupendous joys. The drummer shows up in the spirit of escapism, they beat the cymbals and snares with verve. What a way to lay down grief stemming from familial loss.

In the year 2020, while the COVID-19 pandemic raged and political turbulence seemed relentless, a call was put out by [Carnation](#): BIPOC individuals were asked to submit writings and art pieces for their second volume. The focal theme was *Pleasure*.

Quite paradoxical, isn't it? Given that the submission call coincided with distressing times for many different marginalized communities? Some will ask: "What pleasure?" Others will respond: "These are times we find pleasure in little things, times where pleasure is sought after and not waited for." Perhaps the pandemic—which interrupted the speed, and by extension the normalcy, of daily life—gave people a chance to reassess what pleasure might be, or what it pretends to be.

The resulting volume of *Carnation* was published in November 2021, and I must confess, its formal elements do convey a heightened sense of curatorial intentionality. The pages in the booklet are colourful: oranges, greens, and blues splash at you. It is conventionally sized—like an art magazine.

The publication commences with an introduction to the subject of the second volume, followed by a blurb on the origins of *Carnation* as an art magazine and editorial collective along with a four-page essay reflecting on the position of the editors as non-white settlers on Turtle Island. The land acknowledgement zooms in on colonial and post-colonial injustices and their effects on the land, as well as their inhabitants and custodians:

“We must remain vigilant about the rhetoric of multiculturalism that this nation uses to sell itself to the rest of the world, how we get tangled in it, and in turn how we become prone to projecting our internalized colonial oppression onto Indigenous communities here. The Canadian dream sells an image of stability, acceptance, and peace to aspire to. It is a fantasy; an ongoing colonial project. So much of the world including Canada operates through generating capital, which is produced through violent dispossession and exploitation. The Canadian dream promises us that if we align ourselves with oppressive practices, we can live in the comfort in an innocent and safe country. When we empower ourselves as capitalists and Canadian subjects, we rely on this violence.”

The subsequent two pages of the book house a forward by Jas. M. Morgan, where the producer, curator, writer, and professor of English invites us into the book with a seismic declaration: that BIPOC artists can be equated to cyborgs. Morgan goes on to express the need for an anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal approach to thinking about pleasure to ensure ideal world building. Toward the end of the forward, the following quote sank into me:

“The artists in this zine are a cohort of thinkers, doers, makers and creators who are imagining feminist, queer, and trans forms of refusal. They are cyborgs futuring that which we cannot yet know when caught in a world of imaginary relations by working through methods and methodologies of pleasure. This network knows creation is a space for the limitless possibility for expressing modes of “posthuman” intent, and welcomes you, dear reader, to get lost in the dimensions that they have built for us—to step through and into the future.”

Then something unusual happens: the editors include rounds of letters they sent to each other while editing the volume. Luther Konadu, Christina Hajjar, and Mariana Muñoz Gomez all get personal about their fears and hopes pertaining to the zine. Scattered within these letters reside their angst for clichés, the centering of victimhood, and the tendency to make a spectacle out of pleasure.

They present different takes on the temporality of pleasure, sculpting and resculpting the thought of pleasure as a “proverbial oasis.”



Feature image: Photograph of *Carnation Magazine* open to pages 60 and 61 featuring work by Bishara Elmi, *The Space Between Us (Cynn and Melisse)*, photo by Chukwudubem Ukaigwe.

Image description: “Spread across both pages are two Black individuals in fall apparel. Captured in three-quarter profile, their images are cast on Dutch wax fabric, known conventionally as African fabrics. [...] The subjects in this work look at each other, communicating through the ether, using their eyes as satellites.” – Chukwudubem Ukaigwe.

This image: Photograph of *Carnation Magazine* open to page 43 and featuring work by Wren Tian-Morris 天琳琳, *Untitled Eroticism*, photo by Chukwudubem Ukaigwe.

Image description: “The monochrome picture depicts two working class individuals in technician gear standing close to one another. The masculine-presenting is lifting their hands in submission to the femme-presenting individual, a piece of cloth hanging loosely from their rear pockets. With left knee raised and bent, their leather shoe presses high on the wall behind, making space for a more generous scoop in their genital area by the other subject who is standing at ease. With both wrists to the wall, they lock eyes in severe wanting. This photograph reverses the convention of masculine-active and femme-passive dynamics in exploring the erotic; the two people in the image abandon their work to make time for pleasure, adding a pause to the tempo of capitalism.” – Chukwudubem Ukaigwe.

Avoiding circumlocution, let us breeze through a select number of works featured in the magazine. The first work in this volume is a striking self-portrait by Cheyenne Rain LeGrande 天琳琳. The image looks at you with abjured keenness, like you are yet to answer her question, like you see yourself, bare and ordinary in the mirror of her gaze.

*Untitled Eroticism by Wren Tian-Morris 天琳琳* captures a willful and helpless surrender to the erotic. The monochrome picture depicts two working class individuals in technician gear standing close to one another. The masculine-presenting is lifting their hands in submission to the femme-presenting individual, a piece of cloth hanging loosely from their rear pockets. With left knee raised and bent, their leather shoe presses high on the wall behind, making space for a more generous scoop in their genital area by the other subject who is standing at ease. With both wrists to the wall, they lock eyes in severe wanting. This photograph reverses the convention of masculine-active and femme-passive dynamics in exploring the erotic; the two people in the image abandon their work to make time for pleasure, adding a pause to the tempo of capitalism.

Nour Abi-Nakhoul's "A Baptism" reads in a very sensorial manner. Throughout this piece of text, she ascribes sonic qualities to form and formal qualities to emotions. The first half of this cinematic story is a romanticism of solitude and respite after a day of working: "The stairs to her apartment stretched out before her. Hand grasping the cold metal. Ascending. Key chewing through the lock. Door swinging in, a creaking, soft light spilling over her like a reunion. Baptismal." Suddenly, in the second half of the piece, she twists and turns the narrative into an obtrusive absurdity that is sexually tangible but abstract: "When it moved from her mouth, she looked down at it wrapped around her. Make my body something different she whispered, make my body something different. In response it squeezed the waist tighter, moved itself down between her legs and slid into her."

*Mother Tongue*, by Raiyan Syeda, is a non-chronological catalogue of timely political events steeped in Bangladeshi history, placed in congruity with familial and domestic happenings, and coupled with Syeda's relationship with Bengali (Bangla), her ancestral language. Within the writing, she was able to overcome the neo-colonial stigma attached to speaking her mother's tongue while finding power, freedom, and liberation in embracing the language of her roots.

*The Space Between Us* is a photographic diptych by Bishara Elmi. Spread across both pages are two Black individuals in fall apparel. Captured in three-quarter profile, their images are cast on Dutch wax fabric, known conventionally as African fabrics. A careful study of the portraits that comprise the work reveals that they were photographed separately, however, there is a simulation of presence between the two subjects, an illusion of physical togetherness even though the difference in background negates that logic. The subjects in this work look at each other, communicating through the ether, using their eyes as satellites. The veil that separates these two poles of energy is ruptured leaving everything between them in flux.

In Vanessa Anakwudwabisayquay Susan Cook's autobiographical narration *Minisiwin*, she explores the semantic doubling of the word *Minisiwin* which means both "raspberry" and "family" in Cree, her native language. In the work, she recalls her first taste of a raspberry—a specific euphoric feeling that was replicated for her after giving birth to her daughter.

*Soft Diaspora Privileges* is a brief writing piece by Hagera Selam "shimby" Zegeye-Gebrehiwot that exposes a lurid, plot-specific lust for a workout partner. Whilst in the careless absent-mindedness of infatuation, their hip is burnt by the electric sauna. Ironically, this pain attached to pleasure leaves a physical scar that reignites thoughts of that same potential lover.

The aftermath of pleasure is not usually sentimentalized as we relish pleasure, and the thought of it ending is most times choking—it is this very reason people limit partaking in particular pleasures. [Lan "Florence" Yee & Arezu Salamzadeh's ceramic rendering of tangerine peels](#) urges us to ponder the aftermath of joyous episodic events. Will

the fire of our love be sabotaged and cut at its Olympian precipice?  
Are some of our pleasures detrimental to us and people around us?  
What happens when the music goes quiet, the dancers slow to  
stillness, sweat falls from the air. Perhaps the drummer returns to  
their solitude, humming the blues?

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Chukwudubem Ukaigwe is a Nigerian born song, dispersed by a  
transient Atlantic breeze, currently passing through Canada. He  
consciously uses a variety of mediums to relay a plurality of ideas at  
any given time. He approaches his art practice as a conversation, or  
a portal into one, and in some instances, as an interpretation of this  
ongoing exchange. Chukwudubem operates as an interdisciplinary  
artist, curator, writer, and cultural worker. Ukaigwe is a founding  
member of Patterns Collective.